

Prevention Pathways

Online Courses

Typical Behaviors of Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOAs)

- **ACOAs guess at what normal is.** They have learned growing up that it is best to copy others and not ask questions that might seem stupid. However, the people they are copying may or may not be "healthy" or normal. If the household was chaotic and seemed crazy all the time, that probably appeared normal to them until they saw other types of households.
- **ACOAs have difficulty following a project through from beginning to end.** In many alcoholic families, promises were often not kept. Alcoholics are often not able to take an idea and mold it into a finished product. For example, wanting to paint a room might end up with gallons of paint laying in the basement or a dollhouse might remain unfinished. Kids are taught how to look at a project and figure out what they need to do to finish it. If they are not taught how to do that when they are younger, they might not be able to follow through with a project as an adult.
- **ACOAs lie when it would be just as easy to tell the truth.** Lying is basic to the family system affected by alcohol. It may play a part in denial of unpleasant realities, coverups, and broken promises. It is not necessarily telling someone something that isn't true, but the silence and omission of the truth becomes a lie. The first and basic lie is the family denial of the problem. Unkept promises are also lies.
- **ACOAs judge themselves harshly.** Alcoholics never take responsibility for their own actions. Many alcoholic parents blame the children for things they do. Some say that the children are the reason the parent drinks in the first place. The children are never good enough, never perfect enough. If a person hears something repeated often enough, he or she ends up believing it. As a result, ACOAs often believe that they are no good.
- **ACOAs have difficulty having fun.** They take themselves too seriously. When children grow up in an alcoholic home, they do not learn to have fun. They have to grow up much faster and take care of daily chores to keep the household running. As adults, they may see others having fun as "being silly." Most adults, however, have a part within them that wants to join in and laugh and be silly too. 1

References

Woititz, J.G. *Adult Children of Alcoholics* . Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1990.

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